

P 181729Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9654
INFO WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000723

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [ES](#)

SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE MEETING WITH
SALVADORAN FOREIGN MINISTER MARISOL ARGUETA

REF: STATE 13351

Classified By: The Ambassador, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte met with Salvadoran Foreign Minister Argueta June 3 in San Salvador. Negroponte thanked Argueta for El Salvador's continuing support in Iraq and noted the USG's Merida Initiative as a means of combating shared threats of organized crime and narcotrafficking. Deputy Secretary Negroponte said the U.S. welcomed Attorney General Safie's proposal to negotiate a new extradition treaty and hoped to renew the agreement governing the Cooperative Security Location (CSL) at Comalapa. The Deputy Secretary said the U.S. recognized El Salvador's desire to extend TPS for Salvadorans living in the U.S. Minister of Defense Molina and Argueta expressed concerns about the expanded scope of the proposed CSL agreement. Minister for Public Security and Justice Figueroa urged haste in renewing the agreement before 2009 elections. Deputy Secretary Negroponte proposed that upon his return to Washington the U.S. would determine which proposed additional activities the U.S. truly needed and asked the Salvadorans to determine if the current agreement could be extended without approval by the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly. Argueta said the Saca government fully supported the continuing operation of the CSL and would work quickly to resolve the issue. Figueroa welcomed the Merida Initiative but said El Salvador needed additional resources. Molina said the GOES was committed to working with the U.S. in Iraq but that the lack of a UNSC mandate from 2009 would make continued participation "very difficult". End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Deputy Secretary Negroponte met with Salvadoran Foreign Minister Marisol Argueta June 3 in San Salvador. Argueta was accompanied by Minister for Public Security and Justice Rene Figueroa, Minister of Defense Jorge Molina, Salvadoran Ambassador to the U.S. Rene Leon, and Argueta's Chief of Staff Werner Romero. The Deputy Secretary was accompanied by the Ambassador, WHA Assistant Secretary Thomas Shannon, and the Political Counselor (notetaker).

¶3. (C) Minister Argueta thanked the Deputy Secretary for allowing her to return to San Salvador with him from the OAS General Assembly in Medellin. Deputy Secretary Negroponte noted the deep friendship between the two countries and thanked Argueta for the continuing contribution of Salvadoran troops to Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Deputy Secretary noted he had served as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq in early 2005 and said that patience was in order in Iraq, but that our common efforts there would soon pay dividends. Now, he said, it was a pleasure to be closer to home in Central America and pledged U.S. help to El Salvador to address common threats like gang violence. He told the Minister the U.S. hoped to renew the agreement to use the Comalapa CSL for counter-narcotics activity soon and said the Attorney General had urged negotiation of a new extradition treaty. He said the U.S. recognized El Salvador's desire to extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Salvadorans in the U.S. that would expire in early March.

¶4. (C) Molina said the GOES recognized the importance of the Comalapa CSL, especially in light of the likely closure of a similar facility in Manta, Ecuador. He said Admiral Nimmich

at JIATF-South had told him of the importance of the Comalapa CSL in light of Manta's closure. Molina said the proposed extension and expansion of the agreement governing Comalapa (reftel) was quite possible, but the GOES needed clarification as to the intention of the proposed expansion of the scope of activities and geographic area covered by the agreement. He specifically pointed out questions regarding inter-theater logistical support and counter-terrorism operations.

15. (C) Deputy Secretary Negroponte asked Molina if the current use of the facility presented problems for the GOES. Molina said Admiral Nimmich, JIATF-S Commander had told him Comalapa's location was ideal, after having considered other locations including San Pedro Sula. Molina said the GOES was open to exploring the use of other airports, ports, and additional facilities. Molina said the Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) could benefit from arrangements to provide logistical or fuel supply services to U.S. forces under this agreement.

16. (C) Figueroa said he had been chair of the Assembly's Foreign Relations Committee when the first agreement on Comalapa was approved eight years ago, noting the GOES' preferred name for the facility was a monitoring center, not a "base". He recalled FMLN opposition to the original agreement and assessed that private FMLN assurances that they support continued operation of the facility may not mean the FMLN will not oppose extension in the Assembly. As elections draw closer, he said, this will become more difficult, so we should move quickly.

17. (C) The Deputy Secretary asked about the proposed expansion of activities and geographic scope to cover all U.S. forces in El Salvador in the U.S. proposal, asking what additional activities the U.S. needed. The Ambassador replied that we were seeking an "agreement to agree" on additional activities, without having to return to the Assembly every time, e.g., if the U.S. proposed a humanitarian mission. He noted the GOES could reply "no" if we proposed a specific mission beyond these. Molina said the proposed agreement would expand activities to include search and rescue, noncombatant humanitarian missions, counterterrorism, military exercises, and training. Minister Argueta said this was an "open door".

18. (C) Negroponte suggested both governments consult their capitals and take stock of the existing agreement with an eye to what additional activities, if any, are required for the U.S. to continue using the facility. Argueta said the GOES was launching a legal study to determine what possibility existed to extend the current agreement without going to the Assembly. Deputy Secretary Negroponte asked if a simple extension of the existing agreement would require Assembly approval. Figueroa said the initial agreement envisaged a term of ten years with mutually agreed upon five-year extensions, therefore no Assembly approval would be required.

Negroponte undertook to explore in Washington whether a simple extension of the agreement would be sufficient or if Washington truly required an expansion of the scope of activities covered by the agreement and geographic scope of the agreement. Negroponte suggested a simple extension of the current agreement would be the course of action with highest likelihood of success, and the possibility of the proposed, expanded agreement as a second option. Figueroa repeated that an expansion and the resulting involvement of the Assembly posed a risk. He said it might be best to extend the agreement now and propose expansion of the mission set after the 2009 elections. Argueta said an early extension of the agreement could be justified in order to avoid a lapse of the agreement. Negroponte replied that including new activities could also justify early negotiations and offered to send an interagency team to explain the activities the U.S. envisioned under the proposed agreement, i.e., to explain what an expanded agreement would mean in practice.

19. (C) Argueta said the Saca government was ready to extend

the agreement and was prepared to move quickly on this issue.

She repeated that it was crystal clear that Saca himself was fully in agreement with continuing U.S. use of the CSL. Argueta continued that the recent visit of the USS Boxer and medical assistance missions in Chalatenango provided good optics to U.S.-Salvadoran military relations. Figueroa added his thanks for the Merida Initiative and for U.S. support for the Trans-national Anti-Gang Center in San Salvador. That said, Merida would be, in his view, insufficient to address the challenges faced by El Salvador and he requested the U.S. consider the possibility of additional resources.

¶10. (C) Figueroa said that the GOES was working closely with Colombia on allegations that FMLN members had ties to the FARC and raised the issue that some of those implicated had valid U.S. visas. He urged quick work on a new extradition treaty with the U.S. Deputy Secretary Negroponte agreed, noting that extradition treaties usually took a long time to negotiate.

¶11. (C) Molina said the GOES hoped to continue participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom but expressed concern the GOI would not request an additional UNSC mandate for future operations. This, he said, could complicate future Salvadoran military participation. The Deputy Secretary said the bilateral agreement being negotiated between the U.S. and GOI would envisage and facilitate participation by third countries. Molina welcomed that possibility, but repeated that the lack of a UNSC mandate would make Salvadoran participation "very difficult". He said the GOES would need something from the GOI in order to provide political cover for ongoing deployments.

¶12. (C) Ambassador Leon noted the success of CAFTA-DR and growing U.S. investment in El Salvador, noting a number of problems under the trade agreement had been resolved.

¶13. (C) This cable has been cleared by the Deputy Secretary's staff.

KENNEDY-IRAHETA